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ABSTRACT

The Lyon (France) Graduate School of Business (ESCL), an institution widely recognized for its training quality and depended on regionally to train executives in international business, requires two traineeships of students of international business, the first of which is linguistic in nature. ESCL requires its graduates to speak English and one other foreign language (usually German or Spanish, although a rare student will elect Japanese, Italian or Portuguese). The training is in the form of a company internship in a country in which the target language is spoken, a socioeconomic study, or an intensive language course, according to the student's need. Objectives are clearly specified, and the student must present a written report at the traineeship's end. The school has a foreign traineeship committee consisting of the relevant institutional program administrators, student representatives, and other interested faculty and students, to establish and coordinate links with organizations potentially providing traineeships outside France and to create official documents in three languages to help students in their search for practicums. Several exchange agreements have also been established with American universities, but traineeship exchanges have been harder to realize, illustrating the need for an international exchange consortium or clearinghouse. (MSE)

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THE PLACE OF TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD IN THE CURRICULUM OF A FRENCH BUSINESS SCHOOL AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR TRAINEESHIP EXCHANGES WITH NORTH AMERICA

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THE PLACE OF TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD
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INTRODUCTION:

Knowing the language of another country is not sufficient to understand its peculiar way of thinking, as Montesquieu had Rica and Uzbeck discover in 18th-century Paris. First-hand experience is vital to a truer, more in-depth comprehension of any foreign - and thus alien - environment.

If the problem of cultural understanding is addressed from a commercial perspective and placed in the context of the business curriculum, the conclusion naturally derived, whatever the country or school considered, is that practicums abroad are the natural sequel to the attainment of a certain level of language competence. Of course, all of this fine reasoning is predicated upon the recognition of a real need for an international dimension to the studies offered, a need which in turn stems from the orientation of the local or regional economy toward international markets.

LYON AND ITS ECONOMY:

As a case study of this peculiar set of circumstances, we shall propose Lyon, France, and the Lyon Graduate School of Business. Indeed, in Lyon, the linkage of the development of the regional economy to the evolution of traineeships in the business curriculum is particularly clear. From its very prominent position as a hub of European exchanges during the Middle Ages and Renaissance - in large part thanks to its thriving silk trade and internationally-famous trade fair - Lyon gradually gave up ground in succeeding centuries to Paris, which had become both the demographic magnet and economic dynamo of France. However, in this century, Lyon has in its turn created a large regional pool of manpower. Moreover, both the rapid growth of many advanced technology industries and the city's traditional aversion to following the dictates of Paris have led lyonnais businessmen to seek markets abroad. This international outlook spawned a need for multilingual executives with a knowledge of those foreign markets.

Quite naturally, these businessmen looked to the excellent Lyon school fo business, commonly reputed to be among the top four in France, to train these executives of the future.The choice was logical as local business underwrites one quarter of the Lyon school's budget through the taxe d'apprentissage.

THE ESCL CASE:

Thus, just as greatness is thrust upon some, so is internationalism. The Lyon School (hereafter ESCL) has met the demand for internationally-minded young people in a number of ways, only one of which will be dealt with here - traineeships. In order to give a maximum of on-site contact to its students, ESCL requires two traineeships of them, one of six weeks at the end of their first year (of three) of study and a second of three months at the end of their second year. The goal of the six-week practicum is linguistic while that of the second is professional. In other words, the language takes precedence over other considerations for the first traineeship, although there may be, and usually is, a professional aspect, too.

As ESCL requires all of its students to speak English and another foreign language (usually German or Spanish) upon graduation, the stress in the six-week practicum is usually placed on the weaker of the two languages (or on the weakest of the three for those rare students who elect Japanese, Italian, or Portuguese as their third language). Since the linguistic level is obviously lower than it would be in the first foreign language, it is felt that not all students are capable of working in a company in the target language. For this reason, two other possibilities are open to them: a socio-economic study of one aspect of the country in question or, for the very weak, an intensive language course, preferably on a university campus in the country.

THE TRAINEESHIPS:

In all three cases - company traineeship, socio-economic study or language classes - the criteria for acceptability of the traineeship are spelled out to the students during two meetings of the entire first year class. The students are personally guided in their search for a traineeship by their tutor - one of the language faculty - in the target language and may contact the director of foreign traineeships during office hours. The question of definition sometimes becomes thorny: should a traineeship in an English-speaking company in Holland be accepted or should a practicum in German-speaking Yugoslavia be allowed ? Our decision was no in the first case and yes in the second, based on our ground rule that the student must spend his six weeks in a country (or region) where the language is spoken. In another case, a student found a practicum with Air France as an air steward flying between Paris and New York where he was to be based. Should the stage (all-encompassing French term for "traineeship") be permitted? The decision made was to accept it on a pro-rata basis: the cumulative time spent in New York was allowed and a subsequent and compensatory period in the US was demanded. In other words, the student must be both working and living in the target tongu

THE FOLLOW-UP REPORT:

The criteria, then, for the first-year traineeships are clear to the students before they leave. Moreover, the goals remain crystallized in their minds while they are abroad thanks to the obligation to produce a written document distilled from their experience upon their return to Lyon in the fall. The report must be handsome and serious in its presentation - typed, with covers and spiral binding - and well-organized, including title page, table of

contents, chapter headings, bibliography (optional), and annexes. Furthermore, there must be a central idea to the study which the student has gleaned from his experience. Among recent reports, such themes as the functioning of the Port of Barcelona, relative language loss in multilingual accident victims, the role of regional trade marts in the U.S. clothing industry, and French-English employee relations in a French restaurant in Great Britain have been treated. This report is taken all the more seriously by the students as its weight in the overall curriculum is considerable and as its submission is followed by a forty-minute defense before the tutor who has followed the student's stage from the beginning. The defense ("soutenance") is also a critical element in the tutor's evaluation of the traineeship as it is often only through this oral exchange that the true personal involvement of the student in his stage becomes apparent. After a quarter-hour, often multi-media presentation of an aspect of his practicum not mentioned or developed in the written report, the student answers questio the goal of which is often to see to what degree his conclusions are based on personal observation rather than library research. Hence, the written and oral presentations are complementary and are perceived and accepted by the students as the culmination of their traineeships.

FINDING A TRAINEESHIP: THE COMITE DES STAGES

Thus, the principle of the traineeship and its different phases is clear. However, there are inherent injustices in the system which are social in origin. In other words, the more well-heeled students need only ask daddy to place them in an American, British, Spanish etc. branch of his firm to obtain a traineeship. The others have to scratch, and often scratch very hard, to find a summer job abroad.

In view of the patent unfairness of the situation and given that the School was to some degree responsible as the traineeship is mandatory, ESCL established a Foreign Traineeship Committee (Comité des Stages) beginning in 1983. The Director of Foreign Traineeships became the President of the Committee and was assisted by the Head of the Language Department, the Director of French Traineeships (Service des Stages), the Dean of the Business School, and the elected representatives of the 1st and 2nd-year classes, as well as any other faculty member or student who wished to participate. The primary goal of the committee was to establish a file of new or renewable traineeships. This task was accomplished through a poll of all second- and third-ye students concerning the renewability of their practicum (often, as we have seen, the stage is a gesture made by a given company for a student's father), the person to contact, salary, working conditions, and other remarks. The poll was conducted by a student organization, the B.D.E. Other jobs were found by writing the French Chambers of Commerce abroad and alumni abroad. The German Club organized a systematic mail campaign to all their contacts i Germany and Austria. Finally, the B.D.E. divided all the possible traineeshi into files by language (English, German and Spanish). The English file, by far the largest, was then subdivided into two parts: the USA and Canada o the one hand and Great Britain, Ireland and miscellaneous (Hong Kong, Singapore, etc.) on the other.

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A major concern in the dissemination of the references thus gleaned was to avoid deluging any given employer with applications from our institution. Hence, two types of dossiers were prepared: one with the company's address and one without. Several copies of the latter were made available for the students' perusal in the Language Department. Having noted the reference numbers of the traineeships they prefered, the students then came to the Director of Foreign Traineeships during office hours to obtain the addresses. The Director limited the number of students writing any company to a maximum of five. Of course, the students could have shared the addresses among themselves. However, as the aim of the operation had been clearly explained beforehand, this was largely not done. The system of files worked well in spring 1984 and spring 1985 - with the addition of the new stages found in 1984. As of fall, 1985, the files will be computerized to facilitate student access and up-dating although a blind will be maintained so as to control the addresses given out. Naturally, the new traineeships found each year will be regularly added to the file and those not renewed will be deleted after two years. The B.D.E. has assumed this up-dating as an annual task.

The second objective of the Foreign Traineeship Committee was to create documents in the three principal languages - English, German , and Spanish - to help the students in their search for a practicum. Indeed, a need was felt for an official document authenticating and butressing the student's request for a summer job in the eyes of a potential employer. In the United States and Canada in particular, it was found that firms were not familiar with the idea of a stage as practiced in France. Therefore, a first document was created in the three languages explaining the part played by the traineeship in the ESCL curriculum (HANDOUT). Thereafter, a form letter of application was established in the three tongues - distinctions being made for differences in customs and modes of thinking in the three cases (In fact, as the original was written in American English, a demand has now arisen from the students for a British version). Finally, a curriculum vitae was created in English and Spanish. In German, given the complexity of the question, German teachers prefered to devote in-class time to it rather than distributing a form which might be inappropriate to the student concerned. All three documents - explanatory sheet, form letter of application, and standard C.V. - are on word processor and are available from the Language Department upon request. To date the students have found these documents extremely useful in seeking an internship.

EXCHANGE AGREEMENTS:

Another development stemming partially from the work of the Foreign Traineeship Committee is the creation of several exchange agreements with American universities. As mentioned earlier, the students find job seeking in the U.S. and Canada particularly difficult, and this, for two reasons: (1) firms' unfamiliarity with the traineeship principle and (2) the necessity of acquiring a working visa. Although the latter problem has been eased through the good

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offices of the Council on International Educational Exchange in Paris which distributes some 700 working visas to French students each year, the former remains a major deterrent to those who would like to go to North America. Thus, ESCL has embarked on a conscious policy of multiplying exchanges of two or three stages each with certain universities in the U.S. Administratively, these exchanges are the personal responsibility of the Director of Foreign Exchanges. To date, such agreements have been made with the University of Eastern Michigan the University of California at Fullerton, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The goal of the exchanges is to guarantee a constant number of practicums in North America with on-site university-provided supervision and the required visa. In return, ESCL selects practicums through the good offices of its 2nd-year traineeship program (Service des stages) and will, upon request, correct and evaluate the reports the American students may be required to make for their home universities. Given the high cost of international travel, the duration of these exchange practicums is usually of between two and three months. It should be noted that the major constraint on the French side is the quality of the American students' spoken French. Naturally, the companies involved assume a high level of linguistic competence. Fortunately, with the development of business French programs in the United States, this level is gradually becoming the norm. On the American side, we find that the practicums proposed may correspond to our 1st or 2nd year stages according to the case. Thus, a stage requiring considerable professional competence in a given field (for example, computer programming) is more easily matched to a second year student's profile. A more "linguistic" period working as a restaurant waiter/waitress or behind a hotel reception desk would better suit a first-year student. The selection of a 1st or 2nd-year student is based upon discussion between the partner institutions before finding the practicum. In all cases, the ESCL student's level in English is high and presents no obstacle.

In sum, ESCL is looking for partner institutions in the United States and Canada which share our belief in the usefulness of traineeships abroad and which can provide both students of a high linguistic caliber and the necessary logistic support to find, over-see, and continue such traineeships over the long term. For ESCL, such practicum exchange agreements are a commitment which we neither engage in nor terminate lightly. However, it is our feeling that other internationally-orientated business schools in France are also awakening to the feasibility of such exchanges with the United States. Naturally, needs and requirements vary from institution to institution in France, just as they do in North America. Thus, there is clearly a need for a central clearing house in both France and the U.S. to match prospective exchange partners on either side of the Atlantic.

TOWARD AN INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM:

Solidly established in both countries with its headquarters in New York and Paris, the Council on International Educational Exchange has expressed an interest in playing just such a role. Ms. Andrea Mason, Administrator at the Paris branch of C.I.E.E., is currently investigating the possibility of

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her organization's playing this pivotal part in international practicum exchanges. She will reveal her conclusions during her workshop at the colloquium being held on the ESCL campus on July 5th and 6th, "Language and Internationalizing Business Studies". Should you wish to supply input to Ms. Mason prior to the colloquium, you may write her at the following address:

Mme Andra Mason
C.I.E.E.
1, Place de l'Odéon
75006 Paris

In conclusion, we at ESCL strongly feel that foreign traineeships are a natural and virtually indispensable adjunct to the study of business language, and to the ways business is done in different countries. We believe we have successfully integrated stages into our course of study. Moreover, thanks to the increasingly international nature of our city and region's economies, we are led to train our students for careers abroad and are also able to provide practicums to American students coming to France. In other words, we at ESCL have attained the critical mass for traineeship exchanges and would like to cooperate with American institutions sharing our views.

Robert CRANE, Ph.D.
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Director of Programs for North America